

# MINDSET MONTHLY

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## Servant Leadership

By Joanne Goh

“A leader... is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realising that all along they are being directed from behind.”

Nelson Mandela

Servant leadership style is said to boost employee engagement, increase trust and build great team relationship. This scenario seems to be a much needed solution to the challenges that leaders face today.

Servant leadership is in fact, an ancient philosophy dating as far back as the fifth-century BC, mentioned by Lao-Tzu. Also, in the Christian bible (Mk 10:43-45), it is quoted that “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be servant of all.” And it is in this regard that Jesus Christ himself, the teacher and master, knelt down with towel and basin, to wash the feet of his disciples - a model of humility and servanthood.

While the concept of servant leadership is not new, it was not until 1970 that Robert K. Greenleaf first coined the phrase “servant leadership” in his essay entitled The Servant as Leader.

Servant leaders are mindful of the goals that they are entrusted with. They believe that the goals are for the good of all and hence lead the

team to reach the goals. They place the interests and needs of their followers ahead of their own self interests. In practical modern business terms, it is about identifying and meeting the needs of colleagues, customers and communities. It is not about being servile but about wanting to help others. These are some characteristics of servant leaders:

### Good Communicator

Servant leaders not only actively listen to others, they also have the ability to connect with followers by “speaking their language”. Ideas contributed by others are encouraged and valued. This helps to create an environment of trust and clear communication thereby fostering a healthier work environment.

### Highly Persuasive

Compelling reasons are used to explain why things need to be done so that followers are convinced to do them. There is no use of force. There is selling instead of telling from a position of power.

### Highly Empathetic

Empathy is the ability to detect and understand emotions being felt by others. Servant leaders put themselves in the shoes of the followers so as to understand what is wanting or needed.

### Stewardship

Servant leaders view their position as one of care-taking responsibility over their organization and members. They seek to maximise the potential of resources given. They recognise and take into account the impact of current actions/decisions made not only on the organisation, members and society now, but also to the future. There is careful and conscientious management of resources for posterity.

### Community Builder

Servant leaders build a sense of community and mutual commitment not only between the organization and its members but also their suppliers and business partners. They are highly committed to the personal and professional growth of its members. The community members may be diverse in nature, but all are led towards fulfilling the same goal.

For the longest time, many leaders may already be practising one or more servant leadership characteristics without giving it a name, or even realising it.

The overriding principle of servant leadership is to lead by serving others.

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